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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: GOG OUTLINES ITS VISION FOR POLITICAL

REFORM

REF: TBILISI 1602

11. (SBU) Summary/Comment: The Government of Georgia recently released a document laying out a variety of political reforms currently underway in order to improve democracy and pluralism in Georgia. The document also acknowledges the mistakes the government made in its use of force to quell the protests in November 2007. Following President Saakashvili's September state of the nation address to Parliament (reftel) largely to the letter, the proposed (and in some cases completed) reforms include measures to strengthen Parliament; increase judicial independence; strengthen and increase the role of the opposition; and foster a more open media environment. Although opposition members are skeptical of government motivations, Saakashvili's administration appears committed to making good on President Saakashvili's reform promises as delivered in the state of the nation address. End summary/comment.

PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS

12. (SBU) In his September address, Saakashvili expressed his desire to re-submit the cabinet to a no-confidence vote in the Parliament. The Parliament approved the new PM and cabinet on November 1. He additionally pledged to make it more difficult for the President to dissolve Parliament, and to simplify procedures for Parliament to call no-confidence votes against the cabinet. The GOG document envisions that both proposals will be adopted by the end of November. The government proposed to limit the right of the President to call for new Parliamentary elections. Finally, a new law on the Chamber of Control is expected to strengthen Parliamentary minority oversight on budgetary expenditures. The document listed additional recent changes that allow the seated opposition factions the right to nominate candidates for three vice-chairmanships of Parliament; one deputy chairmanship of each Parliamentary committee; the chair of ad hoc investigative commissions; and simplified rules for establishing a Parliamentary factions as concrete examples of the GOG's willingness to increase and facilitate the role of the opposition in Parliament.

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

13. (SBU) In his state of the nation address, Saakashvili called the judicial system the "backbone and guarantor of our democracy", and vowed to make the judiciary more just and independent. As many experts have advised, the GOG is proposing lifetime appointment of judges to decrease the politicization of the judiciary. Other proposed legislation to reform the judiciary is expected to pass without opposition in December and will include: continuation of the right to a speedy trial; procedural rules changes to shift to a more adversarial process; introduction of exclusionary rules on illegally obtained evidence; and finalizing the principle of inadmissibility of out of court statements. All represent concrete steps to move toward more western style civil and criminal procedures.

COOPERATION WITH THE OPPOSITION

¶4. (SBU) The GOG cited a number of initiatives to show its willingness to work constructively with the opposition. President Saakashvili has already followed through on a promise in the state of the nation address to give the Parliamentary minority additional seats in the Group of Confidence (a special parliamentary group charged with monitoring defense spending, including top secret projects), and one minority member seat on the High Council of Justice (akin to a Judiciary Committee). Also cited are the formation of the Anti-Crisis Council and Temporary Commission on Military Aggression and Other Acts of Russia Against the Qon Military Aggression and Other Acts of Russia Against the Territorial Integrity of Georgia, both of which are high-profile projects garnering an intense amount of media attention. Both are headed by members of the Parliamentary opposition.

INCREASED MEDIA FREEDOM

¶5. (SBU) The GOG announced the appointment of an opposition representative in the Georgian National Communications Commission in order to involve the opposition directly in the process of decision-making for national programming. The GOG recently introduced legislative guarantees to ensure regular broadcasting of political talk-shows with equal participation of all major political parties. Currently, Georgian Public Broadcasting Channel 1 holds a daily political talkshow and expects to launch another in December. Likewise, Rustavi TV 2 expects to launch its political talkshow soon, also slated for December.

POLITICAL PARTIES/ELECTION CODE

TBILISI 00002121 002 OF 002

¶6. (SBU) The GOG will finance all qualified political parties. Basic funding will increase and will also include the resumption of government funding for those parties who lost it due to their refusal to take their Parliamentary seats. The time frame for implementation is the end of November. The GOG intends to establish a working group with participation from the UNM, opposition parties, international organizations, and NGOs to draft a new election code according to international standards to ensure freer and fairer elections in the future. Post will continue to monitor developments in this arena closely and will report on progress to revise the election code.

TEFFT